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Assessing that senior US official

By William Beecher
Globe Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — This is a story about the mysterious "senior US official", who for eight years has been globetrotting on Henry Kissinger's plane, issuing lofty pronouncements and opinions.

His authoritative observations — on issues of the day, on the prospects of sensitive negotiations, indeed on chances of war and peace — are taken most seriously by world leaders and the public in general.

Thus he is one of the most powerful and influential men in the US government. But ground rules imposed on the dozen or so newsmen who travel with him forbid unmasking him by name and title.

What he is:

Witty, charming, informative, liked, misleading, abused, cunning, protected.

This self-same "senior US official" was very much in evidence on Air Force Three, a specially fitted-out Boeing 707 jet when Secretary of State Kissinger made a recent eight-day jaunt, probably one of his last in high government office, to London; Teheran, Iran; Kabul, Afghanistan; Lahore, Pakistan; Deauville, France, and The Hague.

The official is to his accompanying press corps, informative, witty, charming, illusive, misleading, cunning, liked, distrusted, abused and protected, all in the course of a working trip abroad. He has raised the practice of manipulating the press to an art form of diplomacy.

Reporters know they are being used, but, to varying degress, they tend to go along anyway, fascinated, spellbound, flattered to be so intimately associated with a man of such unusual intellect and style. These newsmen lash out in f
and occasionally in pri
waves, at the duplicity
proach. But they stop s
as to risk a divorce of
means too much to them
fessionally.

Not since the heyd
Kennedy has any ranki
been so adept at using th
policy purpose.

On each Kissinger fl
Service men and secret
compartment, while Kissinger, other State Department officials and some wives sit in a forward compartment, which includes an airborne office and a sleeping suite.

On each long flight between stops the "senior US official" customarily talks to reporters both formally, with all of them grouped around him in his office, and informally in conversations with a few at a time in the aisle in the rear section.

In the formal sessions, the official makes some statements, comments on some of their stories which offended or pleased him, and answers questions. Tape recorders are permitted in such briefings because the noise of the engines sometimes makes it hard to hear every word.

Thus, even though reporters are not permitted to quote the man by name, they can review his words by replaying the tapes back at their seats and then write their stories, portable typewriters cradled on their knees or on serving trays. The source is obviously well-informed, but there is no earthly way for the reporters to check what he has just said, unless they happen to have some independent knowledge on the subject.

On the flight from London to Teheran, for example, a newsman asked the official to comment on stories that the Russians on July 4 and July 29 had detonated nuclear devices that may have been of yields higher than permitted under a draft treaty on nuclear weapons tests.

He first disparaged the report as being politically motivated. Then he suggested the range of uncertainty was somewhere between 100 and 200 kilotons. The pact bans tests over 150 kilotons. If careful additional analysis, which was ordered after a meeting of the National Security Council's Verification Panel, showed the test was at the upper range, he said, the United States would do something, presumably demand an explanation from the Russians about the suspected violation of the spirit of the agreement.

Asked about the second test, which reportedly was larger than the first and was almost missed because it came minutes after an earthquake in Russia, the official said he had seen no data on a second one.

This reporter happened, by chance, to [illegible] in Washington a few days before and had been told on good authority that the first test

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Washington Roundup

Henry's Slant

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger directed the Central Intelligence Agency to slant U. S. estimates of the Soviet Tupolev Backfire bomber's range capability, White House officials are charging. Kissinger ordered that the range estimate be reduced to coincide with the present U. S. position in the strategic arms negotiations now under way behind the scenes by Kissinger, according to a White House staff member. Other Administration officials corroborate the story. Kissinger already has conceded to the Soviets that the Backfire will not be considered in the heavy bomber category in the treaty negotiations and is making sure intelligence estimates confirm his position, the White House official added.

The way in which the estimate was derived was through intelligence data provided to McDonnell Douglas. The aerospace firm completed an analysis under contract for the CIA to determine the supersonic Backfire's capability. A 3,500-naut. mi. range estimate reached by McDonnell Douglas was accurate, the White House official said, but the data provided were not all of the information available to U. S. intelligence officers. Only those data the CIA wanted to provide the company were offered to achieve the desired results supporting Kissinger's position, according to the official.

Different Approach

Similar study is now in progress for the Pentagon by McDonnell-Douglas, but it is based on a different set of data—all the information available to Defense Dept. intelligence officials. That study's preliminary results revealed the Backfire's range is closer to the original U. S. intelligence estimate of 6,000 naut. mi., clearly marking the aircraft in the heavy bomber category that would be counted in the 2,400 strategic delivery vehicle limit set in the Ford-Brezhnev Vladivostok agreement. The Ford Administration is preparing to consummate a treaty based on Vladivostok permitting the Soviets to operate the Backfire as an intermediate-range bomber and through other concessions limiting U. S. cruise missiles.

Since the McDonnell Douglas/CIA study, the Pentagon has pulled together top-ranked propulsion and aerodynamic experts from around the nation to examine the study. They have concluded there is no validity in the estimate of the Backfire's range being only 3,500 naut. mi. McDonnell Douglas officials declined to talk to AVIATION WEEK & SPACE TECHNOLOGY about the studies, claiming national security is involved.

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Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

SALT II Strategy

President Ford has quietly changed from impartial arbiter of arms control disagreements within his administration to forceful advocate of the State Department's latest SALT option, which hard-liners claim flirts with disaster for the U.S. and the west.

Assuming Mr. Ford's nomination and subsequent freedom from Ronald Reagan's restraining influence, he is expected to press hard for another strategic arms limitation (SALT) treaty with the Soviet Union before the Nov. 2 election. What's more, it is now clear that Mr. Ford is prepared to buy that treaty at high cost: sacrificing U.S. cruise missiles while the Soviets keep their new Backfire bomber.

The last line of resistance is held by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In recent top secret meetings, they have been unusually tough and plucky in standing up to the President and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. But Mr. Ford seems so determined to have a SALT II agreement this fall that there is little optimism the Pentagon will prevail.

A SALT II treaty has been prevented for 18 months by two new weapons systems considered to be in the gray area of strategic weapons: the Soviets have the Backfire bomber; the U.S. has miniature-motored cruise missiles, which can be launched from planes or ships and which Moscow cannot duplicate today. The question: shall they be included in the limit of 2,400 offensive delivery vehicles each for the U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed to by Mr. Ford and Secretary Leonid Brezhnev at Vladivostok in 1974?

Several options were before the National Security Council (NSC) July 30 when it considered arms control for the last time before the Kansas City convention. But the option generating attention is Dr. Kissinger's latest proposal, regarded by many experts as certain to win Soviet assent.

It would limit cruise missiles by counting them under the strategic ceiling, delivering a fatal blow to the weapons system the Pentagon considers vital for conventional warfare. But the Kremlin would be permitted to go ahead producing (under a meaningless special ceiling) Backfire bombers, air refuelable and possessing obvious strategic potential.

In return, the Soviet Union would be forced to make this supposed concession: a reduction in the 2,400 strategic vehicle ceiling—perhaps by 100, perhaps 200, perhaps even more. The argument for the Kissinger option boils down to this: if Moscow is really prepared to make this concession, it is necessary to prove that the Backfire is not and could not become a strategic weapon. Accordingly, Kissinger's position is strengthened by a top secret study of the Backfire, performed by McDonnell-Douglas Corp., under contract to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), showing a Backfire one-way range of only 3,400 miles.

Furious Pentagon experts, cursing both the CIA and McDonnell-Douglas, call the study worthless and claim the Backfire is a true strategic weapon with a 6,000-mile range.

Moreover, the Kissinger option does not even consider yet another gray-area weapons system developed by ingenious Soviet technicians: the SS-20 missile. While claimed to be just short of intercontinental range, it could be hastily converted into a strategic weapon. Thus, the Kissinger option would permit development of two potentially strategic Soviet systems, the Backfire and the SS-20, outside the strategic ceiling—no matter how low that ceiling goes.

The military chiefs, more passive than Pentagon civilians in recent years, are now fighting hard over SALT II. The estimable Gen. Frederick Weyand, lame duck Army Chief of Staff and long the toughest of the chiefs, has been joined by Gen. George S. Brown, recently confirmed for another term as chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Brown's conversion may have been influenced by the prodding in secret confirmation hearings by hard-line Sen. Henry M. Jackson, who ended up voting for him.

The real hopes of the hard-liners rest with Secretary Rumsfeld. Normally a trimmer, he is now talking plain and hard: the Backfire is a strategic weapon, no matter what the CIA says, and it is intolerable to permit the Backfire while sacrificing cruise missiles. That's what Rumsfeld is saying not only privately but in high-level meetings.

Were Rumsfeld and Kissinger in a great debate for the President's mind, the issue would be in doubt. But the Gerald Ford of 1976, after so much time at Dr. Kissinger's side, is not the strategic arms neophyte who entered office 24 months ago on Aug. 9, 1974. "It would be wrong to call Ford a puppet of Henry," says one well-informed hard-liner on Capitol Hill. "I think he is now a convinced and committed disciple."

If this is correct, it is difficult to imagine the Pentagon staging a real revolt. That is why the Ford administration, in what could be its final major act, may exchange reduced overall strategic limits for clear Soviet advantages in gray-area systems—a cost mili-

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IN FOCUS Use — Or Misuse — of Intelligence to Support Policy

Has an old art reached a new peak under Kissinger?

By Henry S. Bradsher
Washington Star Staff Writer

One source calls it "keyhole questioning."

The way a number of present and former government officials describe it, questions are framed by the administration so narrowly as to elicit responses from the U.S. intelligence community that will support predetermined policies.

There are other techniques for the selective use of intelligence, too. Sometimes a branch of the administration rejects intelligence findings, insisting that some factors have been ignored, until finally a useful finding is made.

What several officials call "playing the intelligence game" is an old bureaucratic art.

They say it was brought to a new peak of refinement and a new frequency of use when Dr. Henry A. Kissinger was the presidential adviser on national security, and it continues with Kissinger as secretary of state in charge of arms control negotiations with Moscow. Other parts of the bureaucracy also play the game.

A senior administration official involved in the reorganization of the U.S. intelligence community under President Ford's Feb. 18 executive order says the changes now being made will not prevent such abuses of intelligence.

MATERIAL STILL can be ordered from the CIA, the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and other parts of the community in ways that will fit it into top policymakers' preconceptions.

One senior official involved in major policy decisions, who describes himself as "an avid consumer of intelligence," says he is unaware of leading questions being submitted to the intelligence community. "These charges fit into the category of insinuations that make the rounds," he comments.

Several other officials and congressional sources point in the direction of that senior official's operations, if not at him personally, as one of the major areas of the selective intelligence use that he denies.

General policies are framed on the basis of overall intelligence evaluations. Decisions are made on what is generally desirable for the United States, like a cease-fire in Vietnam, a strategic armaments limitations treaty (SALT) with the Soviet Union, an interim Sinai settlement in the Middle East, or a new weapons system.

But then new developments, newly received information on old situations, or fresh analyses of problems can sometimes poke holes in policies. Awkward facts that argue against decisions can appear. If the decision was a controversial one in the first place, as many major policies are, then new facts can reopen and threaten to change it.

The tendency, therefore, sometimes is to try to adapt the intelligence to the policy, rather than the other way around, some officials say.

The "keyhole questioning" method is putting very tightly defined requests for specific answers to the intelligence community — primarily to the CIA — without giving the context in which the answer is going to be used or allowing any surrounding circumstances to be considered. These amount to loaded questions.

IF THE FIRST question draws an answer that does not seem to justify the policy course already decided upon, then another one is framed, "just three degrees to one side, enough to force another study, in hopes of getting a different answer," one official explained.

This can go on for some time, until finally the inquirer hits upon a formula that yields an answer that then can be used in bureaucratic debates to support the policy. Earlier questions and answers are quietly forgotten.

A current case in point involves a Soviet supersonic bomber with the Western code name of Backfire.

When Kissinger arranged the preliminary agreement for a second SALT treaty with the Soviet Union in November 1974, Backfire was not included within the limitations. The Pentagon objected that the plane has the capability at striking the United States from Soviet territory, and therefore had to be counted. Moscow denied that it was an intercontinental bomber, arguing that it was properly excluded from the agreement.

This objection has been a major stumbling block in turning the agreement into the treaty that Kissinger and his top advisers seek for overall policy reasons. They have argued in the National Security Council that Backfire did not deserve to be counted.

Backfire also has been a problem within the Pentagon, since it affects arms programs of the United States.

Eight intelligence studies of the Backfire's range potential have been made. Each one showed that it could reach the United States.

According to one source who reflects suspicion of

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